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Former ISU student's struggle with CIA

by Nancy Meyer

All of us make decisions in everyday life, most of the time without giving serious thought to the future consequences that could result.

One day in 1965, Verne Lyon, then a senior in aerospace engineering here at Iowa State, made a fateful decision, which on countless occasions over the years, nearly destroyed his life.

While interviewing for a job with whom he thought were two representatives from an engineering firm, Lyon received a surprise: the two men were actually members of the Central Intelligence Agency—and wanted Lyon to work for the CIA.

"They wanted several informants on campus and I happened to be one of their prospects. At this time, the Vietnam War situation was really getting wound up and engineering students were being threatened with the draft or getting drafted. Some of the major corporations were offering draft deferments but these could not be guaranteed," the former Boone native explained.

Lyon said the two men told him he would be paid \$300 a month and would receive a guaranteed draft deferment if in return, he would report back to the CIA all campus anti-war movements and protests, names of dissidents, both foreign and domestic, names of persons who regularly attended anti-war meetings, and other campus activities in opposition to our government, country and situation in Vietnam.

Campus spy

"My first reaction to this proposal was 'Wow, sounds fantastic! I could be a spy on campus.'"

"Also, the money sounded great," he continued. "I was tending bar back in Boone on weekends to earn money for school and I was driving an old junker of a car that I'd had all through high school. Three hundred dollars relieved me of having to worry about money during my senior year, even though I kept working in Boone for a disguise."

Lyon said in addition to these two reasons, guaranteed draft deferment was a strong incentive to accept the CIA's offer.

"Guys were being shipped over there by the truckload. I didn't want to be sent to Vietnam and get shot to pieces. I'd gone to school to become an engineer and I wanted to pursue that profession."

"Even though I didn't really like my informant work after a while, I thought I was serving my country in a way other than killing people over in Vietnam. At the time, that was very important to me," he stated.

Lyon said he isn't sure why he was one of the few to be approached, but after years of contemplating it, he thinks a friend who went into naval intelligence recommended him. Also, he believes a few of his ISU professors were asked by their friends in the government to identify students who might be beneficial to the agency.

"It has a secret process of selecting future employees, of course, but I think that's probably how the agency discovered me."

Although the CIA's charter in the mid-Sixties prohibited any CIA activities within U.S. borders, the actual agreement under which Lyon worked was called the Domestic Contract Service.

"What I was doing was illegal and I basically understood that at the time," he admitted. "But I wondered how the government could say it was illegal superficially, and then go ahead with its practices anyway."

Before Lyon graduated, the CIA approached him with an offer to join its Junior Officer Training program. This would have led to a career for him in the agency.

"I declined the offer because I was going to have my degree," he said, "and I wanted to spend my life being an engineer. So I accepted a job with McDonnell Douglas Corporation in St. Louis, working on the Gemini Space Program."

Lyon said he thought once he graduated, his ties with the CIA would cease. He was very wrong.

Explosion, arrest in St. Louis

Not long after Lyon began working at McDonnell Douglas, an explosion occurred at the St. Louis municipal airport. A small part of airport under construction was damaged by the blast. Verne Lyon was accused of being the "intellectual author" of the act.

"An anonymous phone call to federal authorities tipped them off that I was supposedly responsible. So they came out to McDonnell Douglas and arrested me. I was charged with committing this act, a federal crime, and then released on \$500 bail with no travel restrictions. Five hundred dollars!" he exclaimed.

Lyon came back to Iowa for a few months, until he was recontacted by his original recruiting officer in the CIA.

"He proceeded to tell me how

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